METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR MANAGING AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/240,070, filed on October 16, 2000.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method and system for managing an information technology (IT) project. In particular, the present invention relates to a method and system for managing an IT project using a structured technique including multiple steps.

The rapid pace of technological advancement requires an organization to periodically update its information technology resources. Information technology (commonly known as IT) generally pertains to systems, equipment and/or software used to store, retrieve, transfer, process and/or render data. For instance, an organization's IT resources may include network systems and services (e.g., intranet, Internet, etc.), database management systems and services, e-commerce systems and services, administrative systems and services (e.g., accounting systems and services), etc.

Many organizations approach the task of developing an IT product in an ad hoc manner. This approach typically entails quickly making a change to a system, observing the impact of the change, and then taking any necessary corrective action. Depending on the magnitude of the project, some organizations may attempt to plan out the IT project by defining different phases of the project, identifying budgetary constraints, and formulating a timeline for completing different phases of the project.

Not surprisingly, informal approaches to IT projects may run into difficulties. For instance, an unstructured approach to IT projects may result in the inefficient (e.g., non-optimal) sequencing of tasks in the project. An unstructured approach may further result in inadequate communication of instructions to project participants. Further, an unstructured approach may result in the failure to obtain necessary approval from the appropriate business and technology sectors within the organization. These factors may lead to increased costs in developing the IT product,

delays in delivering the IT product, and/or substandard quality of the IT product itself. In extreme cases, the unstructured approach may lead to the ultimate failure of the project.

Further still, an unstructured approach provides no mechanism for identifying why a project has succeeded or failed. Accordingly, future projects may fail to incorporate project features that have been beneficial in previous projects. On the other hand, future projects may unknowingly repeat project features that have caused problems in previous projects.

As described above, some organizations have attempted to "manage" IT projects by creating project plans. Nevertheless, such plans are commonly developed from "scratch" for each IT project based on the unique requirements of each IT project. Accordingly, these application-specific plans do not readily lend themselves to adaptation to other projects. This further results in the inefficient use of human resources in the delivery of IT products, as the work product of earlier projects cannot readily be applied to new projects.

The patent and technical literature does not adequately address the above problems. A number of patents are directed to providing computerized tools to assist a user in project management. For instance, U.S. Patent No. 6,036,345 describes a design and engineering project management system. The system includes logic for identifying overall product objectives and group objectives relating to subsystems or components of an overall product. The computer further includes logic for displaying the overall objective and group objectives in a plurality of graphic windows which can be retrieved by a user. The system also includes logic for identifying one or more strategies for achieving group objectives, and for presenting the strategies in a graphic form which allows for quick comparison of competing strategies. The system also includes logic for quantitatively measuring progress toward each group's stated objectives and providing a plurality of graphic displays indicating each group's, and the entire project's, progress toward its objectives.

The above-described patent therefore provides tools for coordinating and monitoring the activities of multiple groups involved in a project. However, the patent does not disclose any type of structured template for managing an IT project.

Accordingly, the patent does not identify how to rectify the particular problems noted above.

There is therefore a need to provide a more efficient technique for the management of IT projects.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A structured process for managing an information technology (IT) project to produce an information technology (IT) product includes a series of principal steps, each of which includes one or more substeps. The principal steps may include: (1) assessing the feasibility of the project to determine whether to proceed with the project; (2) performing initial project analysis to determine the project's functional requirements; (3) designing the IT product; (4) building the IT product; (5) testing the IT product; (6) implementing the IT product; and (7) closing-out the IT project, including evaluating the project.

In order to advance to a next successive step, the project participants must seek approval of one or more authorizing agents.

A method is also provided for providing, accessing and using the structured process. The method includes providing information regarding the structured process, including: (1) first data regarding principal steps of the structured process; (2) second data regarding substeps included in each principal step; and (3) third data regarding approval procedures performed during the process for validating the viability of the project. The method then includes a step of accessing the information and performing the principal steps, substeps, and approval procedures specified in the accessed information. This method can be implemented, for example, using computer technology by storing the information regarding the structured process in a database and using a computer (or network of computers) to access and utilize the information.

The computer may include an output device (e.g., a display or printer) for presenting information regarding the status of the structured process, including an indication of the level of completion of each principal step.